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# IMMORTALITY AND AGNOSTICISM.

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS AND JOHN BURROUGHS.

## I.—“THE GATES AJAR”—TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER.

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS, AUTHOR OF “THE GATES AJAR,”  
“BEYOND THE GATES,” “THE GATES BETWEEN,” ETC.

IT MAY be called either a disadvantage or an advantage that, when a writer has begun his career with a large or a lofty subject of discussion he is never quite “let down” from it. Nothing lower or less is expected of him, nor, indeed, is ever really tolerated in him by his public. Subjects which readily become the concern of his fellow writers are instinctively set away as foreign to his rôle in human usefulness. Any treatment on his part of the frailties or follies of human kind is looked upon reluctantly, and criticised by a kind of impulse which may, indeed, be a tribute to him from one point of view, but which has its inconveniences.

We have all sympathized with the afflictions of the literary hero of a popular extravaganza, whose first story was so unhappy a success that no editor in America could be induced to accept any other forever after from the pen of this unfortunate man. We are reminded of his difficulties—although a little remotely, to be sure—in the contemplation of the persistence with which the reading public demands from an author a repetition or renewal of his “specialty.” Such a demand may be an obvious misapprehension or a clear inspiration, according to the circumstances; but it is as inevitable as the laws of success or failure, and any wise writer will defer to it as cordially as he can.

I have been led into this thought perforce by the request from THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW that I should write the paper to which these paragraphs are the prelude. “Heaven,” said a publisher at a very early period of my life, “Heaven is your hobby.” Comprehending fully that the writer who began with Heaven, can never be widely and distinctly understood to be a being familiar with earth, I always obey such a celestial subpoena—if one may call it so—with cordial consent.

I trust that I may be pardoned a little freer use of the personal allusion than is (perhaps my readers may bear me out) habitual with me, since the existence and history of one little book of mine is the primary cause of this paper. I am asked to express or explain my present views of the future life, as compared with those I held at the time *The Gates Ajar* was written.

At first glance it seems that nothing could be simpler, as nothing is more natural. But upon looking the demand squarely in the eye, its difficulties appear such that I have more than once laid down the page, resolved not to take it up again. Then memory took a wide and solemn tour into regions which no man knoweth save only she and the soul of her that is led into the wilderness. And thus came the pause which precedes and decides the graver work of those of us who speak to the gravest things in the hearts of our readers. And in that sober pause the eyes fill—and the soul bows. And the Angel saith unto the pen, “Write.”

For the history of a belief and the history of a book may be so far one that it is impossible to disentangle them. To a certain extent this is so true of *The Gates Ajar* and of the faith of its author that no expression of that faith could be well proportioned which should ignore the fact.

The second decade and the fourth decade of life teach such different lessons, or teach the same lessons in such different ways, that no surprise would greet the writer, who in middle life should forswear the reason or the feeling of a book written at twenty years of age. And yet the loving reader of any book would be the first to feel wounded or wronged by this most natural biographical sequence. Not many years ago it fell to me to make certain inquiries (upon a topic connected with a piece of work in hand) of the eminent author of one of the most famous religious biographies of our day. The memoir had made an epoch in the spiritual history of thousands upon thousands of souls. He whose beautiful story it commemorated was of so rare a nature, and had led so lofty a life, that one considered the privilege of being his biographer a sufficient final cause for having been born, and looked upon the Christian ideals of that extraordinary subject as of necessity penetrating the soul of the memorialist—himself a religious and refined man, who had performed his sacred task with unsurpassed delicacy and sympathy. Never shall I forget the little jar and shock which I received upon reading the biographer's

letter of reply which, after courteously answering my questions, intimated that he had himself so far outgrown that epoch in his life of which the biography was the expression that he could not now call himself in full sympathy with it. Very possibly the idealization of an adoring reader overestimated the lapse—if lapse there were—but it seemed to me at the time as if he had forsworn his own soul.

In the personal case of which it is my lot to write at this time, no such shock, let me hasten to say, could await my kindest, saddest or most confiding reader. *The Gates Ajar* is not yet, and, I pray Heaven it may never be, a work forsworn. It has been the happy fate of this book to illustrate, confirm and illuminate the faith of its young writer to herself. As this paper is not an autobiography, a hint must suffice to suggest the facts which it would crowd chapters to relate, and in a few words it can be told that what I venture to call the human argument for a divine truth, as called into expression by that effort of a girl's pen, has never been overthrown by any counter conclusion of the woman's more mature and cautious religious faith.

The passionate beliefs of youth and the quiet faith of middle life cannot be formulated in the same manner or subjected to the same processes of illustration. Yet similar laws may determine both to an identical conclusion. In either case, I take it, the human argument,—or the argument from the plea of humanity for a satisfactory future life,—must be our main dependence.

The Biblical Revelation throws some light upon our future existence, and no Christian believer would incline to underrate it. But, perhaps, it is timely to say here that I do not lay quite as much stress upon this as I did in youth; having come to believe that it was not one of the primary objects of the Bible to gratify human curiosity in this direction; but by a divine reserve to stimulate both thought and trust, so far as these are affected by the final mysteries which so intimately concern all men.

The familiar proposition of Sir William Hamilton, that God is of practical interest to us only as He is the condition of our immortality, can never be too often brought to our remembrance in any fair dealing with religio-philosophical problems. The great philosopher could afford to say this brave and simple thing, not because he was great, but because he was devout and great; and the most timid of all souls in pious prisons need not fear to

follow the mental freedom of such a master. With equal simplicity and reverence it may be said that the future life is of interest to us only as it explains the mystery of this. Or, to go further :—the future life is of interest to us only as it justifies the existence of this.

We start at “fair-and-twenty,” eager, ardent, imperious, hungry for happiness, petulant with fate, rebellious against anguish and grasping for hope ; arrogant to maintain that the personal factor is the conclusive one in life’s mysterious problem. At forty, we stand with calmer pulse and failing heart-beat, and the sadder but stiller eye that has become acquainted with existence. We no longer demand and insist in the wrong—perhaps not even in the right—places. We do not hit out from the shoulder at fate. The longing for repose takes the place of the demand for joy, and it is easier to rest than to exact. At too hard a blow, some unexpected day, we fall ; and are surprised to find no life left in us to rise to the conflict again. In fine, the liabilities of weakness replace the temptations to be found in the assets of strength.

Our lessons are still before us, and school is not out. The higher mathematics follow the primer. It is only a new phase of the curriculum that we have to meet. Face the facts ! Life has still the best of us, and will have to the end. Give over with fighting and frenzy ; accept, and conform and obey ; for hope or despair substitute trust and patience ; but the familiar truth presents itself ; existence as a personal problem is still unsolved ; and its solution is the most imperative need which fate has left to us.

What has been called the argument of acquired human trust I have elsewhere made use of as holding to my mind the most powerful reasons for a belief in the benevolence of God. It might be said that the simple argument from accumulated human experience is the most useful one that offers itself to us for the support of a rational faith in the desirable nature of the future life. Clearly, experience has taught the happiest of us that the most important questions of our individual lots are unanswered on this side of the grave. It has long since become one of the axioms of the intellectual world that only the superficial or the thoughtless are at ease in the state which we call life. “How can any sensitive and thoughtful man permanently possess good health ?”

Longfellow once asked. "Outside, I laugh," said Dr. Holmes, "but inside I never laugh. The world is too sad."

It is not without significance that the testimony of two such fortunate and, on the whole, happy men comes instinctively to the pen's point, by way of illustrating what we are seeking to say. It is not external success and happiness but internal sensitiveness and perception which are qualified to formulate the human problem. The ignorant man pauses far behind it, like the Celtic friend who said: "As long as I get a roof over me head and clothes on me back and food in me stomach, I'm askin' no more. I've got nothin' against this world beyont." What stronger argument for a system of universal education in the next life could that simple soul advance, than was unconsciously crowded into these thirty words?

As this paper is not an essay to prove the doctrine of immortality, which is assumed for our purpose as a point already sufficiently well settled by human intelligence; so it may be said that it does not require too many pages of *THE REVIEW* to prove that human life, at its best, is a sad affair. Simple to triteness as this observation is, it cannot easily be offered in these days when culture and religion are both forced to an exotic warmth which it is the fashion to call optimism. It requires some courage to say, point blank, that this life is, so far as this world goes, taken as a whole, a failure. Our great-grandfathers made nothing of conceding this obvious truth. But we are wiser if not happier than they. Call it what you please, the fact remains. The human argument is the simplest and most sensible that we have for the nature of the life which we believe is to follow this. And accumulated human experience testifies all one way,—its joy and its sorrow, its success and its disappointment, its hope and its despair,—all go to prove, and, rightly looked at, equally go to prove that existence upon this earth is not a whole but a fragment. If a fragment, it must be either nebulous or meteoric; undeveloped and selected, or overdeveloped and rejected. This is simple science. It is in keeping with the whole system of things to take a choice between these two explanations of the history of our planet. Ruin or growth—dissolution or evolution—that is the alternative.

Not to pursue the point, which would be an interesting one if space permitted a little metaphysical détour, it is enough to say that this paper is written for those who are not prepared to con-

sider this as a rejected world, but as a selected one ; who believe that growth is clearly the law, and blight the accident, and who are, therefore, educated to view the fragmentary nature of this life as so much ground for expecting its future adjustment to a symmetrical whole. In truth, the trend of modern thought can never go very far beyond the simple premises of earlier and less querulous philosophy. We do not say a new thing, but we cannot say a truer than this, in short :—The incompleteness of the present life is the strongest argument that we possess for the probable completeness of another. How else are we going to account for the awful waste of material which goes on forever in our dark history ? How else explain the terrible corrosion of suffering upon sensitiveness ? How explain what otherwise were superfluous sacrifice and wanton cruelty ?

An ignorant mother puts a baby into a cooling cook-stove to keep the infant warm while she leaves the house. The father comes home, unacquainted with the circumstance, lights the fire, and roasts the child. A fireman, heroic to save life, is trapped at the top of a burning building whose roof-hydrant he has climbed to open ; seeks escape by the nearest electric cable, and is dashed eight stories to the frozen ground. The noblest man in the regiment—young, beautiful, gifted, pure and strong—crosses before the fire to help a wounded comrade, and is picked off by the shrewdest bullet in the enemy's lines. There drops the promise of more grace, more power, more high-mindedness and sensitiveness, more aspiration and achievement—more of the finest values of existence—than the whole cause of the petty war which murdered him could have compassed, if it had been won without a blow. A healthy, happy young creature on a gala day takes the train that is foredoomed to a collision ; and for thirty, forty, fifty years an invalid upon a “mattress-grave” lies staring at the walls of a coffin-room and mutters : “Why ?” A motherless girl, too young for the knowledge of the tree of good and evil, errs for love, and her broken life sinks into a nameless, unforgiven and irreclaimable shame, which finds no respite till it finds the grave. A child is born without eye-sight, speech or hearing—lives to be a very old person—and patiently passes out of existence. The first sentence which the expert teaches this poor prisoner of mystery to write affirms that “God is good.”

Good ? If a world where such tragedies are past computation contains no promise of compensation and justification in another—no ! Good ? Yes, as God lives and reason is,—because mystery and misery and waste and sin shall find their justification in the happiness and the holiness of the celestial economy which death reveals.

Because this life is what it is ; *because* it is a thing fatally incomplete, we have the intellectual and the moral right to expect its glad and pure completion in another state. Such being the liberal and reasonable belief of experience and maturity, one is surprised to find how easily it leads us in the direction which the fancy and the fever of youthful imagination so boldly and so imperiously took.

How naively and how trustfully the young life demanded of its Creator its soul's desire, and used the foundations of all Heaven to support that personal structure ! And yet how humbly and how thoughtfully the chastened faith of middle life returns to a view of the future scarcely strange to that familiar dream.

It was no less than Aristotle who taught us that wonder was the first cause of all philosophy ; and "belief," a great metaphysician has said, "always precedes knowledge." If this world is a failure, some other, let us believe, must be a success.

If, in this life, the soul is sickened by its own defects, it must in some life have strength and opportunity to cast them off. The most consuming desire known to human nature—the passion for purity—may grow out of experience of error and what theologians call repentance for sin insists upon space to exist, as much as the roots or trunk of an oak. If here we have been beaten to pieces by those varieties of suffering to which we give the safe and general name of discipline—since, presumably, man was not created for the purpose of being made miserable—relief from suffering must follow somewhere "as the night the day."

Such assumptions are along the line of the laws of development, and are as reasonable as any pure speculation needs to be.

If the heart has been broken it shall be healed. If the soul has been bruised it shall be solaced. If holy hope has been blighted it shall be brought to bloom. If aspiration has been thwarted it shall be gratified. If guilt has been sublimated into sorrow and resolve it shall be forgiven. If desolation has blasted the nature



it shall be comforted. If valuable self-sacrifice has been wasted it shall be redeemed. If the ties of home have been torn they shall be renewed.

Repair is one of the conditions of growth, and it is as rational to expect these sequences to this defective life as to expect a healthy tree to overgrow the cut of the axe, or a healthy child to recover from a bump on the forehead.

Practically, what does this mean? In point of fact, not of philosophy, what has the mature and reasonable mind to expect concerning the details of the future life? Do we discard the pleasant dreams of youth and a hopeful fancy? "Look!" cried the dying Corot, "Look! How beautiful! I have never seen such admirable landscapes!"

Even as I write this page, a letter, but just received from one of the "great unknown," whose communications haunt a writer's life, falls open at these words:

"Oh, that beautiful Heaven, where are real homes that are warm and do not leak like mine does!"

A scholarly essay has recently been written by one of the most eminent of living scientists, to prove that hell is a location which has been much misunderstood, and which is, in fact, an agreeable place of residence. Shall the Christian student find no reasonable ground for saying at least as much of Heaven?

Are we to have no more homes and communities and sweet neighborhoods, and the graces of arts and letters and science, and fair moods of weather and fine phases of scenery, and splendors of beauty, and raptures of fruition and surprises of achievement and comforts of love?

Do we leave them all behind us with the "piano," which was the obstinate stumbling block and cause of offense to hundreds of religious and unimaginative readers of *The Gates Ajar*?

But why?

The next world being of interest to us only so far as it justifies the existence of this, the next world clearly is bound to remedy the defects of this. One does not offer this suggestion with a breath of flippancy, but may reverently and solemnly defend and maintain it. If God is good, if the soul is personally immortal—and both of these conditions are here assumed—then the future life will atone for the errors and miseries of this, naturally, lawfully, logically and inevitably.

Individual immortality presupposes personal character, tastes, desires, demands and necessities. The goodness of God is under awful and glorious bonds to provide for them. Did He create life to be blighted, hope to be wasted, the home idea to be devastated, hearts to be broken, souls to be shrivelled, high purposes to be thrown to the winds of chance, and holiness to be misled by delusion?

In the reverent pause with which the heart answers these questions, the instinct and the habit of trust in our Creator are gently justified. If God is good, the craving of human nature for a rational, attractive and expansive future life will be satisfied. Since God is good, the wail of the shivering widow under the leaking roof is as important a factor in our argument as the rapture of the great artist whose dying eye perceived celestial landscapes unseen by mortal ken. Because God is good, all good things shall be added unto us. Beyond these old-fashioned, devout phrases the deepest philosophy cannot lead us, and need not go.

After the lapse of nearly thirty years I cannot recall without emotion the letters which fell like the drops of a storm upon the author of the little book, which has served as a text for these pages. They were the letters of the bereaved;—from all countries, all ages, all sorts and conditions of men. They came with the deep, black margins that told their story before the seal was broken. They came with pages half illegible from the stains of tears. Sometimes I used to lay them aside, awaiting a courageous moment to read through the tale of woe which even the personal blessings and affectionate prayers that loaded them could not mitigate. They were destroyed a few years ago;—and they numbered thousands. From every form and phase of misery these outcries rang—and still ring, often yet—in ears that find it impossible to forget or ignore that wail.

How shall I bear this anguish? Comfort me, for I am left desolate! Help me, for my heart is broken! Where is he whom my soul desired? Where is she who was the light of my life? Tell me, tell me that my lips shall touch my vanished child again! Prove to me that I shall find my lost and chosen friend! What is life, for I am sorely smitten? Welcome death if it bring me to my own! Hasten this which you call Heaven, if it means that which you do aver! How knew you this? Did an angel speak it in the ear? Did a spirit guide your pen? Was it a

dream of the night, or a vision of the day ? How prove you this ? Do you delude us with a fairy tale, or feed us with the holy faith ? Do you believe what your own lips have spoken ? Are you a deceiving prophet, sent to confuse the people ? Or is the spirit of Almighty God upon you ?—

Thus ran the sad entreaty and the stern and inspiring demand. So rang the pitiful, passionate, human outcry, day after day, year upon year—a dirge of despair, a pæan of eternal hope.

Oh, long silent voices of ten thousand unknown sufferers ! Your echoes have not ceased their solemn reverberation through the humbled and deferring heart. Thirty years have not taught me higher philosophy than your litany of agony and of consolation. Upon your sacred reasonableness I rest, and to it I return. Yours was the human argument. It shall be found the Divine privilege and duty to recognize it. The Creator will not forever confuse and confound the created. Heaven alone can justify earth ; and as God liveth, justification is sure.

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS.

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## II.—THE DECADENCE OF THEOLOGY.

BY JOHN BURROUGHS.

THE death of Tennyson the other day with a copy of Shakespeare in his hand instead of the Bible or prayer-book, and with only his family and physician by his bedside, does not seem to have sent any shudder through the orthodox religious world. That a great poet should seek (in his last moments) to lean upon the spirit of another great poet, gone before, is natural enough, too natural, one would think, to suit the supernaturalists. Tennyson was of a profoundly religious nature, but evidently he had worked his way out of the quagmire of the theological creeds. It was a significant death-bed—science watching the body and literature ministering to the soul. Where the parish priest was we are not told. Men's thoughts, in their last hours, are turning less and less to him.

The atmosphere of our time is fast being cleared of the fumes and deadly gases that arose during the carboniferous age of the-

ology. Renan with his divine gaiety and serene reason, has been one of the forces, that has helped dispel them. Professor Huxley, in his recent volume of essays and discoveries, drives them before him like a gale from the mountains. It would hardly seem possible for any self-respecting theologian to again stand up for what is called the historicity of the New Testament miracles. Yet there be those who look upon all this with uneasiness and distrust.

"Is the spiritual sense decadent?" asks one of our current religious journals, meaning by the spiritual sense the faculty to discern the truth of the current religious dogmas. The writer is forced to the conclusion that this sense is weakening, but takes refuge in the thought that the objects of faith are like the stars in the sky which the sun (science) may obscure, but cannot blot out. It says the agnosticism of Huxley and his kind is but the confession of a child that it cannot see by morning light the moon which it saw at bed-time. The argument of the religious editor frankly admits that there is light in the world, and that it is no temporary or uncertain rush-light either, but the light of the real heavenly luminary itself.

The analogy suggested is no doubt a true one; the difference between our times and the times of our fathers is mainly in the greater light of our day, the light of exact science. We see things as they are; we see how and where the delusions of the past arose, that they were incident to the general obscurity, that these portentous forms that were so real and threatening to our fathers are either shadows or harmless inanimate objects. No doubt we have lost something—something in the direction of poetry and religion, the anthropomorphic gift. Man cannot make the world in his own image, or project himself into it as in the pre-scientific ages. Nature is not so plastic and neutral in the light of the sun as under the light of the moon. The-day has its own obscurities and illusions, but they are not those of the night. Things take on less portentous forms; the eye and not the imagination rules. What power there is in mere darkness, or obscurity, itself! Take a person of unenlightened mind, and see what things he will accept, simply because they are mysterious and transcend experience. In my youth the belief in ghosts, haunted houses, witches, signs and warnings, were almost universal among country people; now there is hardly a vestige of such belief left. The change indicated

is not merely a change of weather as Cardinal Newman thought; it is a change of climate. It is the passing of one geological period into another.

The world is real, and goes its own way. The poet has a harder problem before him; the priest has a harder problem before him, but the men who are to do the world's real work find the problem much easier,—I mean the men who are to clothe, and feed, and shelter, and warm, and transport it,—who are to fight its battles and subdue and reclaim its waste places. Science has its own mysteries and sublimities, and they have this advantage—they are real; they are not the reflection of the mood or the fancy of the observer, they are not the result of obscurity, but of the limitations of the human mind. Knowledge outstrips imagination.

Feeling, emotion, fall helpless before the revelations of science. The height and the depth that surround us, and the power in which our lives are embosomed, which the darkness of earlier ages did not permit us to see, baffle speech. Magnitude, perspective, order, system, connection, is what the light of science reveals to us. How much sentiment, how much poetry and religion we can read in these things depends upon us. The nearness, the privacy, the fireside charm, and the dark-closet fear of nature are gone; in short, its purpose, its affection or hatred, as directed to you and me. The universe is going its own way with no thought of us; to keep in its currents is our life, to cross them is our death. This discovery sends the cosmic chill, with which so many of us are familiar in these days; it makes the religious mind gasp for breath, but we must face it, and still find life sweet under its influence. The world is not yet used to the open air of this thought—the great out-of-doors of it; we are not hardened to it. We have been so long housed in our comfortable little anthropomorphic creeds, with their artificial warmth and light, that when we are suddenly turned out of doors by this thought we experience, I say, the cosmic chill. It is quite probable that future generations, with a more robust religious sense than ours, will have a different feeling in the presence of this discovery.

Behold, what a chill, or series of chills, the religious mind has all along felt under the influence of the revelations of science. Medicine, geology, astronomy—all have convulsed the religious mind. Evolution set the teeth of both priests and laymen chattering, and many of them are chattering still. Those who have

been acclimated to the thought find new inspiration in it ; their religious sense is more vigorous than before. It is like new blood poured into depleted veins.

It is beyond dispute that of the two rival or conflicting conceptions of the universe now pretty familiar to all current readers, the scientific conception and the theological conception, the one is waning or becoming feebler day by day, the other growing stronger day by day. Up to the sixteenth or seventeenth century the theological conception held almost complete possession of man's mind. Only here and there did a bold thinker like Bruno or Roger Bacon chafe under its sway. But in our time the theological conception has been so modified by science that it is hardly recognizable any more. It has been modified by the scientific conception, crowded back and lopped off here and there till but few of its real features remain. When it fully possessed men's minds, as during the long stretch of the theological ages, it cropped out in and colored every department of life and thought. Every event, every fact of history and experience, and every phenomenon of nature was seen through the medium of this conception. Out of it grew the belief in magic, alchemy, astrology, witchcraft, demoniacal possessions, sorcery, apparitions, miracles, charms, exorcisms, etc. These notions fitted perfectly with the theological conception—the conception of a world made and ruled by an anthropomorphic being. The belief in a devil or evil spirit upon whom to saddle all the mischief and disease and disasters became a necessity. How could a benevolent being do or permit these things ? A devil must be bad, even if we have to make one.

Think of the time when men really believed in the devil—when they did not simply believe that they believed in him as we do nowadays, but when they believed in him as really as they believed in heat and cold, night and day, life and death ; when doctors and theologians guarded their mouths while exorcising an evil spirit lest he jump down their throats. If a man inhaled a little fly by accident his reason might be unhinged by terror lest he had swallowed the devil. The King of Spain used to sleep between two monks to keep the devil off. What a dreadful hue was given to life by this belief ; in what a constant state of apprehension and alarm men lived ! The insane, the epileptic were of course possessed of the devil. All evil, storms, pestilence, disease, everything malodorous, was the work of evil spirits.

When the scientific conception began to awaken in many minds, not a step could it take, or cause to be taken, without a collision with the theological conception or its brood of hateful offspring. Hence arose the warfare of science with theology, which is a thrice-told tale. Lecky has written it in his history of Rationalism, Draper has written it, Andrew White has written it, and is now adding his "New Chapters."

Not one foothold has science gained without a struggle. Not one province has theology given up till it was compelled to. But step by step it has been forced to retreat, till at least four-fifths of its territory is now occupied by its great rival. Magic and sorcery, and alchemy and astrology are given up as idle dreams, witchcraft and hob-goblins, and even the good devil are delusions of our fathers. The belief in miracles is narrowed down, among Protestants, to a very small span of history, namely, the New Testament miracles, and even these will probably soon be given up. The medical practitioner no longer uses charms or amulets or fantastic remedies; he is no longer fighting against evil spirits or seeking to thwart the will of God. The devil theory of insanity only lingers here and there in a few minds but, the president of one of our colleges lately declared, in print, his belief in it.

Some of the religious journals have protested against the experiments of the government to compel rain, showing a remnant of the old theological idea that rain is a special providence. Probably the same type of mind is shocked at the audacity of the lightning-rod man; to be consistent it ought to discountenance the umbrella man as well—since to shed the electric fluid by aid of the lightning rod seems no more irreligious than to shed the aqueous fluid by aid of the umbrella. The government agents found men in Virginia who had religious scruples about spraying their grapes against the black rot, and many good people still hold to special providences in their daily lives. Prayer, especially for material good, is a survival of the old theological concept. But for all practical purposes, in medicine, in geology, in astronomy, in the daily ordering of our lives and in the springs of our natural civilization, the theological conception has been overthrown and the scientific conception has taken its place. We no longer tremble at an eclipse, or at a comet, or see in the northern lights the gleam of the fires of hell. We have learned something of the laws of storms and the causes of pesti-

lence, and have found that cleanliness is a better safeguard against fever than fasting or prayer.

But what is the scientific conception of the universe? The idea in its simplest form is implied in the statement that such and such an event or such and such a course of conduct is according to nature, or else is against nature, thereby recognizing the fact that there is an inherent order or sequence in the course of natural events. To find out this order and formulate it is the object of science, and leads to the scientific conception of the universe. To adjust our lives to it and avail ourselves of it is the success of our material civilization. In this conception the material universe is self-existent, self-governed, without beginning and without end, having no limits in time nor bounds in space. It leads us to the conviction that the sum of physical forces is constant, that the laws of causation and the conservation of energy are everywhere operative, but without initiation and without finality.

There is the same difficulty in placing limits to time, that there are in placing limits to space. Both are unthinkable. The annihilation of matter and the creation of matter *ex nihilo* are alike unthinkable. The man of science finds the order of nature rational, that is, effects are always linked with causes, that uniformity is never broken, that nothing is interpolated but follows in due course, in short that evolution and not special creation is the key to nature. It follows that man is of animal origin, that he is fitted to his environment rather than it to him, that nature befriends and furthers him when he obeys her laws, and crushes him when he crosses them. Science knows no other plan of redemption than the survival of the fittest, knows no other day of creation than this day, knows no other fall of man save the present daily fall of ignorance and vice, knows no heaven or hell save those we make for ourselves, knows no immortality save the persistence of life and force, and finally knows no God save the infinite Power that fills and floats all things.

Science does not prove that miracles or the supernatural are impossible, but it begets in the mind a conception of the universe which finds no place for these things. It discloses a harmony and a completeness which leaves no room for alien and extraneous forces. It is a complete solvent of the old notions. Theology recognized it as its mortal enemy at once and has fought it inch by inch. Every generalization of science has been so much terri-



tory wrested from theology. What a blow to it was the Copernican system of astronomy! How Newton cut under it with his law of gravitation, how Darwin with his theory of the origin of species! It has been shorn of its influence like the Pope of his temporal power, it is confided almost entirely to the region of the unverifiable, and there it is safe. It may hurl its anathemas at the man of science, it may grant or refuse future probation to the heathen, it may consign the pagan philosophers to purgatory, it may damn infants, or indorse murderers, it may call itself Calvinism, or Methodism, or Catholicism, or Millerism, and the Time Spirit will look on content. Any spiritual influence it may still have over the masses, any power to brighten and elevate men's lives science can thoroughly appreciate. But even its spiritual power is waning fast.

The principle of the unity and completeness of nature, or this perception of nature as an entity, a thing in and of itself, is comparatively a recent evolution. Our fathers had it but feebly, our remote theological ancestors not at all. But there is a growing conviction in the human mind to-day that the forces of nature are constant and adequate to all the phenomena of the visible world, and that there is no room and never has been any room for the introduction of forces extra-natural. Akin to this, and a part of it, is the feeling that any system of religion to be credible must be in line with the rest of our knowledge. That we apprehend moral, philosophical, artistic and scientific truth with our normal faculties, but religious truth with a faculty that is a special gift from some power above us and that is not in any way related to the former, is a view hostile to the scientific synthesis. Our spiritual knowledge cannot contradict our natural knowledge. Faith must supplement, not forestall reason. If the law of evolution is not continuous, and if it is not adequate to cover the whole field of human development, religious as well as scientific, then we must find the law that is.

We make a monstrosity of creation when we make it half natural and half supernatural. If religion is something that has only an accidental relation to a man's natural capacity for goodness, and sin something which has only an accidental relation to his natural defects and shortcomings, then are those things contradictory of the rest of our knowledge. Why the man of science has difficulty with the current faith is because it will not fit in

with the scheme of things which science discloses. It is an anomaly, an exception.

If a preacher were to say : " My friends, we are all brothers of the man Jesus Christ, flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone ; what he felt we may feel ; what he saw we may see ; what he did we may do ; we have in kind, though may be not in degree, the same power and capacities he had ; we can live as pure, as noble, as disinterested a life as he lived ; we may show, in a measure, the same meekness, gentleness, humility, unselfishness, lovingness, charity, truthfulness, brotherliness as he showed, and the coming to him means coming to our better selves, to the Jesus within us, to our capacity to be and do like him," we should understand him. He would be speaking words of soberness and truth. If he were to say that salvation by Jesus Christ meant salvation by cultivating Christ-like qualities, not the believing this or that about Christ, but by living up to the Christ-like ideal,—if he were to say these or the like things his words would be strong by the whole weight of science and of human experience. What he does say or do, is to unfold the plan of salvation, in which such terms as the council of the God-head, the fall of man, imputed guilt, vicarious atonement, etc., play the leading parts.

My orthodox brother will charge that I speak as a natural man to whom these things are foolishness. Well, the natural man has come a good way to the front these latter days. He will not be sat down on with impunity any longer. He is backed up as he has never been before. Time was when he was utterly squelched and disposed of by simply telling him that he was the natural man, one with natural forces, with the carnal, unregenerate, devil-beridden natural world, and that all good things were on the side of the extra-natural or theological man. He was a poor, lost and ruined creature—an outcast in the universe. But how are the tables turned. It is your theological man, your man of miracles and special providences, of witches and demons, of riddles and revelations, who is on the defensive now. He is stripped almost naked ; he has barely a foot of ground to stand upon.

The natural man, the man of reason, has the whole of science, the enormous sum of human knowledge, the whole visible order of the universe on his side. Our civilization is his, the future is his, the stars in their courses fight for him. We have learned, if we have learned anything, that spirit loves matter, that it blooms out

of it, and that it is from within and not from without that salvation comes ; that the race of man has had many saviors and must have many more. The enigmas of the old theology are exploded ; religion takes its place in line with other normal forces, unfolding out of man as surely as his poetry or his art. It is natural or it is nothing. No matter how truly supernatural the devotee may think his religion, his very delusion is natural. Those poor wretches who confessed themselves witches during the witch-ridden age were the victims of a natural delusion.

In all religious matters, in fact in all subjective matters, we are fast coming to see that truth is not a fixed quantity that may be seized upon and monopolized by any sect or church. We are beginning to see even further than that. We are beginning to see that there are no distinctively religious truths—that all truth is one, that the faculties that distinguish truth from falsehood in any sphere are always one and the same. Religion is a sentiment, and is true as a sentiment—it is real, but the objects of faith may be real and they may not. They are not truths unless they are verifiable. The world within we re-create daily. The outer world is always the same. It is only our ability to deal with it that fluctuates. Hence the facts of science, so far as they are facts, are constant, while systems of ethics, religions, philosophies, theories of this or that, are in endless mutation. Pilate's question : " What is the Truth ? " was not the question of a scoffer. What, indeed, is the truth about the melting and changing forms and figures we see in the cloud-land of man's moral and religious experience ? That there is or can be no final truths in these matters, in the sense in which there are final truths in science, we are beginning slowly to see.

When religion imitates science and formulates a creed in which it seeks to give permanent intellectual form to its so-called truths, it takes a false step. The creed, as we see, soon pinches and must be made over new. When man draws hard and fast lines in religious matters, he soon finds himself compelled to pull down and build larger. The conception of God is being completely made over in the religious conscience of our time. As man becomes more benevolent and merciful he makes himself a more benevolent and merciful God. The God of our Puritan fathers will not do for us at all. The moral difficulties of Calvinism are getting to be as insurmountable as the intellectual difficulties of

Catholicism. The God of to-day, or the divine ideal towards which the religious conscience of our time is struggling, one may feel some liking for, but the God of the Puritans, of Calvinism, was a monster too terrible to contemplate.

We shall soon enlarge the conception of religion till we shall not use the term at all in a special or restricted sense. We shall see that all lovers of truth are lovers of God. When one pauses to look at it, what utter selfishness or selfism lies at the bottom of the old creeds—the one thought of a man to secure his personal safety from some impending danger. The soldier who is determined to come out of the battle with a whole skin is not the ideal soldier. The man of science, the truth-lover, how much more worthy his self-forgetfulness, his renunciation, which has in view no personal end whatever. The new birth of science—the dropping of all worldly and secondary ends, the absolute devotion to the truth for its own sake—is there anything more truly religious than this? Darwin cared nothing for religion, so called, because his mind and his conscience were enlisted in his science. He was serving God disinterestedly.

“Esaias is very bold and saith, I was found of them that sought me not ; I was made manifest to them that asked not after me.”

“He judged the cause of the poor and the needy ; was not this to know me ? saith the Lord.”

JOHN BURROUGHS.